

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES IN TEACHING COLLOCATIONS

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Collocations constitute an important layer of the lexicon in the English language. Traditionally a collocation is defined as a combination of words that tend to occur together (collocate). Some of such combinations are highly predictable and some are less. Collocations can include different number of components, from two to five words. According to some estimates, collocations make up about 70% of the information presented in both written and oral forms. Collocations help us communicate more quickly and efficiently. Teaching collocations is very important and should be done on a regular basis. It is of no less importance than teaching pronunciation or grammar patterns.

Some authors distinguish between lexical and grammatical collocations. Lexical collocations combine two (or more) equal lexical components, for example, *unconditional love, peer pressure, to bridge a generation gap*, etc. Grammatical collocations combine a lexical word, usually a verb, noun or adjective and a grammatical word, for example, *to distract from, be conscious of*, etc. According to this approach, phrasal verbs are also considered to be grammatical collocations. It is desirable that they should be recorded and learned with other words collocating with them, for example, *to bring about (cause something to happen) - to bring about changes, improvements*, etc. The same refers to phrases of the type *to confide something to somebody – to confide one's secrets, doubts to somebody*, etc.

Collocations may be of several different types, the most widely used are the following: adjective + noun, noun + noun, verb + noun, verb + adverb, adverb + adjective, verb + adjective + noun, etc. While selecting collocations in the classroom it is important to take into account two factors: collocations should be in common usage and suitable for the students' level. As a rule, course book texts contain a lot of collocations. The teacher's role is to help students identify useful collocations,

underline and write them out. Then the students are encouraged to learn them and use in everyday practice. In such a way we can speak about the collocational competence of the students. Alongside with the classroom activities students need to increase this competence by acquiring new expressions on their own, through independent reading.

Texts in the course books are usually thematically-related, and they provide a necessary basis for selecting and training collocations. At first the teacher can make up a list of useful words and phrases for a thematic unit himself/herself. Later students can compile such vocabulary lists independently or together in the classroom. One of the activities may be working in small groups when the students read either some shorter texts or a long one divided into several extracts, then they write out 20 key words and phrases and give them to the other group of students for reconstructing the content of the text. The teacher should insist on choosing the vocabulary carefully, giving preference not to individual words but to 2-3 or even 4 component collocations. Then group of students exchange their notes trying to supplement the useful phrases on the theme. We can have similar activity not only while reading but while listening, too.

Another way of introducing useful collocations in the classroom is finding a text on the theme, in the Internet for example, and creating a gapped text. If you want to practice a concrete collocation group, delete adjectives from adjective + noun collocations or verbs from verb + noun collocations. In the classroom students work individually or in small groups suggesting appropriate words to restore collocations. Sometimes there can be several variants but if they are lexically and grammatically correct it is accepted. Such activity helps students expand their lexicon.

An important aspect in acquiring and training collocations is writing essays. At an advanced level good writing is characterized not only by accuracy and fluency but also complexity. It refers not only to grammatical patterns but to a variety of lexicon, including different groups of collocations. Many students say that they lack ideas on the theme, but in fact it is closely connected with the lack of thematic vocabulary they possess, collocations in particular.

While preparing students to write an essay teachers try to brainstorm useful vocabulary and it is especially important to involve collocations into brainstorming activity. It can be done in the following way. First students select nouns which are associated with the main theme of an essay. Then they should think of adjectives and verbs that collocate with these nouns and finally they name adverbs which collocate with the verbs. Besides, some idioms and phrasal verbs can be added, as well. It can take different forms, a table or a spidergram, for example. As a result, the students have a list of key words and phrases which will be helpful in their essay writing.

In addition the teacher should not forget about the role of English-English dictionaries and special dictionaries of collocations in teaching them. They can provide useful information on collocations, giving examples and illustrating their usage.

According to some methodologists, modern computer-based research of written and spoken language confirms the fact that fluent speech consists largely of short phrases, rather than sentences. Many of the phrases are relatively fixed and they make up the basis of fluency in speech. The teacher should encourage the students to learn and use collocations for presenting basic information both in speaking and writing.

References:

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